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## Rep. O'Neill Plans To Leave Congress After Next Term

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WASHINGTON—Rep. Thomas O'Neill indicated he intends to serve only one more term in Congress and then step down in 1986 as House speaker.

In a brief interview, the speaker confirmed that he is a candidate for reelection but said he would retire after "another term." He indicated that he expected to remain as speaker through 1986.

Mr. O'Neill's comments are the most specific to date on his plans, though those closest to him have long speculated that he might step down as he outlined yesterday. The Massachusetts Democrat has been determined since early in the Reagan administration to help lead his party back to this summer's convention. And if a Democrat is elected president, Mr. O'Neill would almost certainly want to serve at least the first year.

He has endorsed Walter Mondale for the office, and if the former vice president wins the nomination and election in November, the speaker said he would ask eventually to be appointed Irish ambassador.

After the heavy Democratic losses in 1980, there was widespread speculation that Mr. O'Neill, a liberal, wouldn't seek reelection. But the 1982 results proved to be among his greatest political triumphs as Democrats made sufficient gains to break the Republican-Southern Democrat majority that had dominated the last Congress.

Though bothered by an inner-ear infection, Mr. O'Neill, 71 years old, hasn't been troubled by any major health problems. But because of his age, there has been recurrent interest in the fight over his succession.

First elected to the House in 1952, he currently is the nation's highest ranking Democratic official, and his life and character have come to symbolize the New Deal politics of his party. Asked yesterday if he saw Mr. Mondale's loss in the New Hampshire primary to Sen. Gary Hart of Colorado as a defeat for the older politics of that era, the speaker smiled and said he may have his right foot in the "bucket of the past," but his left was in "the bucket of the future."

Majority Leader Jim Wright is the strong favorite to succeed Mr. O'Neill. Though more conservative than Mr. O'Neill, the Texan has sought to strengthen his ties among liberals by taking a strong stand for cuts in defense and opposing funding for the MX missile and the CIA-backed war in Nicaragua.